

Nov – There's Life yet!

If you thought this bee blog was going to be all Honey Show and me waving goodbye, you would be wrong. Well only a little bit but this bee blog has some more life to go.

Whilst the Honey show loomed large in the November calendar, the bees were still very busy. The weather had been unusually mild and the girls were making the most of the ivy and any other plants that were having a very late bloom. This prompted me to check the bee's food level and maybe replace the small block of fondant that I had put in. It was later in the day than I had planned and at this time of year that meant the light was fading. To speed up matters I just put on my beekeeping jacket with the big round veil, my black work trouser that are thick cotton. With my trousers tucked into my socks and my usual wellies on headed down to the hive with my block of fondant. After all this was just going to be a two minute bee job.....

By now I had come to recognise the sound of the bees in their hive and what type of mood they will be in. I hadn't even touched the hive and was just standing behind it but the high pitched sound of the bees was letting me know that they were not happy with me being there. But I had a job to do and I told them that I wouldn't be long and I even had some nice fondant for them. Yes that's right I've started talking to my bees now.

With the hive strap undone and my hands on the hive roof the bees were out letting me know just how they felt and let it not be said that they were a touch angry about something, mainly me it seemed. Now normally I would have backed off and come back later, but the next day was set to be very wet (it was) and I really wanted to make sure that there was some extra food in the hive even if they didn't need it. So ignoring my gut instinct to run away and ignoring the bees too I bravely carried on. Lifting off the hive roof the girls really came out flying around me, when I lifted off the top crown board on the feeding eke the bees were going for me. Not just head butting my veil but crawling everywhere and all over my gloves looking for an entry in no doubt. I had never seen these bees so upset. Wasting no time I picked up the empty takeaway container that I feed them fondant in and replace it with a full one, all the time bushing bees off my gloves. There was no let up even after I had put the top crown board on. That's when I felt it, a sharp stab on the inside of my right thigh just above my kneecap. Oh pants! My thick work trousers were maybe not as thick as I thought and I knew if one had stung me there it wouldn't be very long before her sisters followed. Still working carefully I put the hive roof back on, the strap on the other hand could wait I was out of there!

I would like to say that was the end of it and I went back a lot later and put the hive strap on but I would have missed that when I was just far away from the hive and the bees had stopped following me there was still a buzzing sound that I couldn't work out where it was coming from, that was until I looked down inside my veil into my jacket and there on my chest was a bee making her way towards my head inside my half suit. Oh F...! I quickly put my left arm across my chest above the bee as not to squash her but keep her in the body of my jacket and there lies a unique problem for me. My right arm will not lift up high enough to undo my veil. There I was standing in a wood with a bee buzzing in my jacket with no actual way of getting her out without letting her climb into my veil. Great!

A happy ending, my partner was luckily still working in the garden and heard my distressed mutterings. Once she had undone my veil the bee flew out straight into a nearby fuchsia bush that was still flowering. I went in the house for a cuppa and my partner chuckled a lot. Yes there is a moral to this story in fact there is a few. 1: ignore the bees at your peril. 2: there is no such thing as a quick bee job. 3: half bee suits are okay unless you get mobbed by bees and lastly and importantly 4: work trousers are exactly that, work trouser and are not sting proof even if they are made of thick cotton!

As I was fortunate enough to take a few litres of honey off this year's harvest, I had decided to take part in the November Honey Show. It was good tasting honey so I had as good as chance as anyone. I had made a few rolled candles which was more fun than it should be for a grown adult and went through this year's photos of the bees and

hive. I'm not a bad baker and my first test run of the honey gingerbread cake was promising, maybe a little over done but nothing a few timing tweaks couldn't sort out. My main concern was that when I had spun off the honey, I had only used a coarse filter and one or two of my jars "might" have a few specks in. I'm not talking bee legs or anything like that just tiny specks, I decided to try and filter it again through one of those fine filter bags. Oh my! Even with the honey heated to 40c the honey didn't want to pass through the filter. It did a bit, a tiny bit and at that rate it would be ready for next year's show! So there I was with my high powered touch, tiring not to blind myself shining a light carefully through my best pound jars and using a clean teaspoon removing anything I thought was a blemish.

So eventually with everything ready, the day before the show I headed down to the hall where the Honey Show was taking place for the setup. What I never expected was just how nervous I felt, I mean it's only honey right? So there I was carefully cleaning the jars for about the hundredth time in case there were any fingerprints, carefully putting on the stickers and checking everything again and again. After I went home for a stiff whiskey and my partner chuckled a lot, tomorrow would be the judging behind closed doors.

Of course I had the best honey and won all the prizes, okay maybe not quite. I did win a nice tankard for my photograph of a pollen covered bee but my honey was up against a lot of very good completion in its class. That said it was a great day, after the Honey Judge gave her summary and prizes were given out we all got the chance to catch up with friends, have a proper look at the other entries and of course try a bit of the wining honey gingerbread cake, which was very good even if it wasn't mine. The atmosphere was great and I learnt a lot just listening to what the Honey Judge had to say and to other beekeepers. Will I be taking part again next year? Well, I will leave that to the bees and what they may or may not do. It was fun though.

Well that's it from me, my turn as novice bee blogger is over and time for a nice new novice voice to take over and enjoy their thoughts and ideas. I have certainly taken a great deal of pleasure in writing this blog and I can only hope that you have not only found it entertaining but maybe a tiny bit useful too. You might be thinking that in this episode I have not mentioned My Bee Mentor(MBM) well worry not, because I think it is only fair that MBM has the last word after all he has been the one who has been guiding me thus so far. So Ladies and Gentlemen I give you MBM....

"Thanks Chris.

As a former member, it is nice to have some contact with the association again through my Bee Mentor (BM) position.

I was glad that Chris -about two years ago- took over my colony. Due to my work for the u3a, I had less and less time for them. An unfair situation, because even though bees are quite independent, every now and then they can't do without human help. And so Chris and I came to the decision to move the colony to his address while I would support Chris in his learning process as a beekeeper. Our joint experiences Chris has humorously shared with you all in his blogs. The strength of his blogs is that he made himself vulnerable and gave others the opportunity to learn from his approach. Looking back on our collaboration; it was fun to do the checks together and honestly; Chris learned the most himself. Not only through the mistakes he made (no learning without), but also through the knowledge he gained in the association. As BM, I gave tips at our checks and tried to let him discover things for himself more than anything else. Beforehand we discussed the WHAT, WHY and HOW of what we were going to do. My fondest memory is the check where we were surprised by the birth of several queens.

It is good that now another novice is taking over Chris' job as bee blog-holder. These types of blogs are instructive for experienced members and novices alike. I wish you and your colonies the best for the future, some nice days at the end of each month and maybe with some of your 'own' honey?

MB"

As always take good care now and Bee Safe

Chris

Of course I haven't forgotten the Bees, I had already thanked them and told them the results of the Honey Show and there would be no bee blog without them!